

VIP ASSASSINATION AS A TOOL OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE IN POST COLD WAR ERA

Summary: This article is an attempt to show why and how the VIP assassination is a tool of asymmetric warfare. The constantly increasing number of the actors of international security along with a growing level of interdependence between them lead to more and more conflicts, which for the same reason, are more and more often of an asymmetric nature. As the human factor is perceived as the most important one, elimination of key figures comes into focus as a really effective tool of waging the post-Cold War conflicts. What is even more interesting is the fact that not only non-state actors, which appears obvious, but also states decide to take advantage of this method. More and more frequently committed "targeted killings", especially by the US and Israeli military and intelligence, constitute the evidence.

Keywords: VIP, assassination, asymmetric warfare, post-Cold War conflicts.

The end of the Cold War witnessed fundamental transformations of international realities. The definition of international security has widened to include more issues and actors. The realistic paradigm of security, which featured a state-focussed approach and treating state and international security solely in military terms, slowly began to pass into history. A new post Cold War paradigm of security begun to develop. There are two main reasons for this and both are consequences of globalisation. The first is the growing importance of non-state actors in international relations, which weakens the influence of states. The second is the increasing significance of the non-military aspects of security. Examples such as economic, technological, demographic, ecological, cultural, religious and humanitarian aspects (Madej, 2007, pp. 27-29).

Both the above-mentioned aspects, in addition to other effects of globalisation, lead to a constantly increasing number of subjects and objects of security. As a result of this, a growing level of interdependence exists between them. This, in turn, raises the number and the probability of conflicts among them. A plethora of actors in international relations in addition to a rising number of those acting unofficially and illegally are the reasons that more and more conflicts are of an asymmetric nature.

Asymmetry, referring to conflicts, means a distinctive disproportion of potential between the sides in a specific conflict. Asymmetry of potential compels the weaker side to resort to asymmetric methods of warfare, because the weaker has no chance to defeat the stronger with the use of methods, means and tactics in accordance with commonly accepted norms of the art of war. The weaker side, realizing perfectly well that it is not able to get into a conventional fight, strives to equalize the existing disproportion by taking actions aimed at the weakest and neglected points of the stronger enemy. The weaker

side also does its best to take advantage of the incomplete preparations for this kind of action by the stronger side. As the weaker side has significantly less means than military and economically stronger enemy, it assumes that due to using asymmetric methods it will achieve disproportionate results in comparison to expenditure (Madej, 2009, pp. 337-343).

At the beginning of the XXI century, the most powerful, the richest, the best equipped and trained armed forces which have ever existed are in retreat. There are a lot of examples of their failures. The days when three times in a row Israeli defeated allied military forces of Arab countries are forgotten and instead, after seventeen years of futile attempts of suppressing the Palestinian uprising, one of the most modern armies in the world left the Gaza Strip and a part of the West Bank. Other powerful military forces are in the crucible. After more than ten years of occupation in Chechnya, completely destroying the capital city of Grozny, killing, wounding and making homeless hundreds thousands of Chechens, the Russian army is still not able to pacify this small country. In Afghanistan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and a dozen other countries, military forces have been waging counter-guerrilla warfare. In terms of pure military power, all of them are incomparably stronger than their opponents, but none is successful. What is more, some of them are doomed to failure. An especially worrying example is that of the US in Iraq. It does not matter whether Bush's decision to attack Iraq was justified or not. The opponent of the superpower was a Third World country with GNP many times lower than any comparison would not make sense. Twenty years before Iraq had lost two-third of its military forces. The forces which were to defend the country just dropped the weapons and deserted. Not long after the military operation was completed the most powerful military forces in the world could not handle several thousand terrorists (van Creveld, 2008, pp. 9-10).

The side of asymmetric warfare does not have to be a state. It can be, in practice, any organized group of people (e.g. political, religious, criminal, terrorist, ecological). Asymmetric warfare falls outside any rules or conventions. It does not know such terms as battlefield or front line. It is conducted in dispersion and without maintaining geographical and chronological continuity (Piątkowski, 2002, p. 41).

From the very beginning of human conflicts, people have resorted to the methods categorized today as asymmetric. Assyrians contaminated their enemies' cereal with ergot. Athenians contaminated water in besieged cities. Jewish Zealots, Japanese Ninja and Nizari Ismailis Assassins spread terror among incomparably stronger antagonists (Białek, 2005, s. 46-47). In the course of time people responsible for military affairs in their countries have both developed existing asymmetric methods and tried to invent new ones. Despite this, however, up until the end of the Cold War the majority of conflicts were fought conventionally, according to the methods advocated by Clausewitz. Namely, in order to defeat the enemy, the other side had to act concurrently. In addition to defeating an enemy army on the battlefield it strived to attack its point of gravity. In other words attacking important centres both military and civil. Leading examples of targets could include the following: military headquarters and civil authority centres, arsenals and strategic stockpiles, armaments industries and refineries, military airfields

and civil airports, harbours and communication centres. Such actions often preceded the main attack of the army or were counted to forestall and destruct the expected attack of the enemy army. Attacks such as these became more and more common along with the development of the air force and parachute forces, which were both used on a large scale during WW II and after, up to the end of the 1970s. In the post Cold War world the weaker side often uses methods such as assassination, the spreading of biological or chemical weapons by post or waterworks, triggering social unrest, utilising media campaigns, provoking international pressure, destroying symbolic places, and cyber attacks to list only a few from the endless assortment of possible asymmetric methods (Piątkowski, 2002, p. 41). Those methods have been all finding their way to the battlefield in spite of longstanding international prohibitions.

Non-violent resistance is also a form of asymmetric warfare, although very rarely is it considered as such by academics and field experts. Non-violent resistance exploits a variety of low-risk tactics such as demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, stay-aways, go-slows and other forms of civil disobedience. Due to these relatively safe methods people do not have to make large personal sacrifices which is why non-violent resistance campaigns gain a high level of participation. In the long run mass non-violent civil disobedience and non-cooperation become extremely disruptive which makes it an effective tool to overthrow dictatorships and throw out foreign occupations (Chenoweth, 2011).

The face and nature of conflicts in the post Cold War world has been transformed from mainly conventional or symmetric methods into more and more asymmetric ones.

These above-mentioned asymmetric methods of warfare are all in the weaker side's bag of tricks, with the exception of VIP assassination, which is in use by both sides in asymmetric conflicts. As the human factor is perceived as the most important, the stronger side also resorts to this method of waging war.

A simple list of VIP assassination committed during asymmetric conflicts of the post Cold War era shows us that it has been the stronger side that has resorted to this method much more frequently. There are several reasons for this. First, in any asymmetric conflict the stronger side is always much more vulnerable than its weaker antagonist. Second, elimination of a key person, especially in a key moment of the conflict is always a factor that cannot be overestimated. Third, the stronger side has always much more capability to eliminate key people from among the weaker side because of its considerable intelligence and technical advantages.

Such VIP assassinations are almost always committed away from the battlefield and on people not directly engaged in military operations. Such victims do not appear combatants vis-à-vis their killers. Assassinations committed by the weaker side almost always take place in civilian areas. In such circumstances there is a significant risk of collateral damage. For these reasons, they are commonly condemned by the international community on the basis of international law. Those committed by the stronger side, although executed in similar scenarios, are said not to violate international law and justified with the simple statement that the victim was an active participant in the ongoing war. The belief that warfare in the post Cold War era is so different from past

armed conflicts that most of the legal and moral prohibitions no longer apply, unites a variety of intellectuals and both political and military scientists and practitioners.

There are many examples of assassinations on key figures committed by the stronger side and we find it extremely difficult to point out those which occurred in the battlefield. This is the consequence of the fact that while a guerrilla warfare scenario features the indefinite and blurred battlefield, in the war on terrorism the battlefield simply does not exist. As a matter of fact, in today's world guerrilla warfare scenarios and terrorist methods are irrevocably intertwined. The abundance of lessons learned teach us that catching a terrorist red-handed is hardly possible, so the assassinations committed by the stronger side have been almost always preventive or of a retaliatory nature.

These several selected assassinations committed by the stronger side in asymmetric conflicts illustrate both the sophisticated methods of killing people and the importance of such actions for the states fighting guerrillas and terrorism.

Table 1. Selected assassinations committed by the stronger side in asymmetric conflicts

Ordinal number	Name of the victim	Position of the victim	Year	The perpetrator/s	Result
1	Yahya Ayyash	main Hamas bomb-maker, nicknamed "The Engineer"	1996	Israel Defense Forces (Rystad, 2007, pp. 26-27, 271)	Killed
2	Dzhokhar Du-dayev	the first Chechen president	1996	Russians Air Force in Chechnya (Barber, 1996)	Killed
3	Sheikh Ahmed Yassin	founder and spiritual leader of Hamas	2004	Israel Defense Forces (Hirst, 2004)	Killed
4	Mahmoud al-Mabhouth	leader of Hamas' military wing	2010	Mossad (Harel, Issacharoff, 2010)	Killed
5	Osama bin Laden	Al-Qaeda founder and leader	2011	US Special Forces in his compound in Pakistan (Nowak, 2011)	Killed
6	Atiyah Abd al-Rahman	one of the Al-Qaeda leaders	2011	US Special Forces (US drone strike kills key Al-Qaeda leader in Pakistan, 2010)	Killed
7	Abu Hafs al Shari	Al-Qaeda operational chief for Pakistan	2011	US Special Forces (US drone strike kills key Al-Qaeda leader in Pakistan, 2010)	Killed
8	Abu Anas al Libi	Al-Qaeda operational chief for Libya	2013	US Special Forces (Blair, 2013)	Captured

Source: own elaboration.

Assassinations from the weaker side are much less sophisticated in nature but they feature determination and conviction about their effectiveness as methods of engagement.

Some selected assassinations committed by the stronger side in asymmetric conflicts are presented in the table below:

Table 2. Selected assassinations committed by the weaker side in asymmetric conflicts

Ordinal number	Name of the victim	Position of the victim	Year	The perpetrator/s	Result
1	Alfred Herrhausen	chairman of Deutsche Bank and advisor to the chancellor of West Germany	1989	leftist terrorist group (Deatherage, 2006, pp. 148-149)	Killed
2	Ingrid Betancourt	Colombian presidential candidate	2002	Marxist-Leninist FARC movement (Profile: Ingrid Betancourt, 2008)	Survived
3	Benazir Bhutto	Pakistani former prime minister	2007	Al-Qaeda in Pakistan (Benazir Bhutto assassinated, 2007)	Killed
4	Edelmiro Cavasos Leal	mayor of Santiago city, Mexico	2011	one of the drug cartels (Madrir, 2010, p. 35)	Unknown
5	Christopher Stevens	US ambassador to Libya	2012	Al-Qaeda in Libya (Harding, Stephen, 2012)	Killed
6	Asadullah Khalid	Afghan intelligence chief	2012	The Taliban (Afghanistan intelligence chief Asadullah Khalid injured in assassination attempt, 2012)	Survived

Source: own elaboration.

The Cold War security environment features not only a new set of interrelationships, but first and foremost a wide range of threats. A good number of them are new, being by-products of development and globalization. In the environment of the new security architecture, VIPs have come into focus not only as an obvious part of this, but they are also irrevocably intertwined with the new threats.

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ZABÓJSTWO WAŻNYCH OSÓB JAKO NARZĘDZIE ROZWIĄZYWANIA KONFLIKTÓW ASYMETRYCZNYCH W OKRESIE PO ZIMNEJ WOJNIE

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest próbą ukazania, dlaczego i w jaki sposób zabójstwo ważnych osobistości jest jednym z narzędzi rozwiązywania konfliktów o charakterze asymetrycznym. Postępujący wzrost liczby aktorów stosunków międzynarodowych oraz rosnący poziom interakcji między nimi prowadzi do coraz większej liczby konfliktów, które też, z tych samych powodów, mają coraz częściej charakter asymetryczny. Postrzeganie czynnika ludzkiego jako najistotniejszego prowadzi do przekonania, iż eliminacja kluczowych postaci jawi się skutecznym narzędziem rozwiązywania pozimnowojennych konfliktów. Niemniej, godnym uwagi jest fakt,

że nie tylko aktorzy niepaństwowi, co jest oczywiste, ale również państwa, decydują się sięgać po tę metodę, czego dowodzą coraz częstsze „targeted killings”, dokonywane przede wszystkim przez amerykańskie i izraelskie organizacje wywiadowcze i siły zbrojne.

Słowa kluczowe: ważne osobistości, zabójstwo, konflikt asymetryczny, pozimnowojenne konflikty.